On this question, I will make some assumptions, based on the information given:

1. There has already been a need determined for the laptops, because no college or university would make such a decision out of thin air.
2. Basic information about requirements for the laptops has been determined because any applications destined to be run on the laptops is probably what drove #1.
3. Resources are fairly limited, as are potential vendor options, which have been pre-vetted, approved, with purchase policies staunchly guarding the process (can you tell I now work at a university; Texas A&M)?

Given these assumptions, I would first inventory current infrastructure to see what laptops exist that would work for the application at hand. There may be none, and all current laptops need refreshed, but the first step is to see if we can utilize existing resources as much as possible. The second step is to determine how many laptop remain to be purchased.